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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000200

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SCUL](#) [KISL](#) [IR](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: DETAILS OF MOROCCO'S DIPLOMATIC BREAK
WITH IRAN

REF: RABAT 0196

Classified By: CDA Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The senior Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) official in charge of Middle East and Islamic affairs told us that Morocco broke relations with Iran due to Iran's negative reaction to GOM support for Bahrain's sovereignty, Shia proselytizing activities in Morocco and Iran's unwillingness to explain its recent admonishment of the Moroccan Charge in Tehran, the same reasons cited in the MFA communique. We believe the GOM may also have been motivated by the presence at a Tehran conference on Gaza of a senior figure from the Islamist-inspired Party of Justice and Development. The rupture, which reversed a long-term upswing in relations, may have economic impact -- Iran buys Moroccan phosphates and sells it oil. In any event, we detect the personal involvement of King Mohammed VI, who may have been looking for a reason to back out of a planned visit to Tehran. End Summary.

Terms of the Diplomatic Break

12. (C) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Director General for Multilateral Affairs Ambassador Mohamed Azaroual described Morocco's severing of diplomatic relations with Iran last Friday, March 6, 2009, (reftel) as a clean break. On March 9, Azaroual told D/PolCouns that the Moroccan Charge in Tehran had been recalled to Rabat last week, followed by the GOM's expulsion of the Iranian Ambassador in Rabat on Friday, March 6. Azaroual said that Morocco has ordered both the Moroccan Embassy in Tehran and the Iranian Embassy in Rabat to be closed, and their respective staffs to return to their home countries "as soon as possible."

Moroccan Justifies Its Actions

13. (C) Azaroual, echoing official MFA press statements, cited the Bahrain affair and meddling in the internal religious affairs of Morocco, i.e., Shia proselytizing, as the official reason for Morocco's decision make the break (reftel). Azaroual demurred on providing details on Iran's activities in Morocco except to say Iran's contacts with several unnamed non-governmental organizations in Morocco had crossed a "red line" of GOM sovereignty, adding that reports from Moroccan intelligence services were "full of proof," regarding these activities.

Morocco Singled Out for Supporting Bahrain

14. (C) Azaroual also said that Iran's unwillingness to

explain why Morocco had been singled out among all the other Arab countries that had supported Bahrain had also contributed to Morocco's decision. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had gone public about calling in the Moroccan Charge on Bahrain (reftel). Azaroual summoned Iran's Ambassador to explain, and Morocco recalled its Charge. The MFA failed to receive an explanation from the Iranians (despite waiting over a week and follow-up calls from both Azaroual and Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri to the Iranian Ambassador).

Morocco's Take on Iranian Calculations

15. (C) Azaroual speculated that Iran's actions in the entire Bahraini affair, and its follow-up actions with Morocco, had been deliberate and calculated. Azaroual, who was Chief of Mission in Tehran (1993-2000), said Khamenei Advisor Nateq-Nouri (former Majles Speaker and Interior Minister) was undoubtedly authorized by his boss, when he described Bahrain as the "14th Province of Iran" in mid-February (reftel).

16. (C) Azaroual denied any connection between Morocco's break with Iran and the recent visit to Iran by a delegation of Moroccan parliamentarians, made up mostly of members of the Islamist-inspired Party for Justice and Development (PJD), but we have our doubts. The unofficial delegation, led by the PJD's most confrontational leader Chamber of Deputies member Mustapha Ramid, was in Tehran a mere two days before the GOM broke off relations with Iran. Ramid criticized Egypt on Iranian television, which portrayed him

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as a quasi-official GOM representative (Note: Ramid was also criticized by Egypt. End note.) Newspapers in Morocco have been critical of the PJD's motives for going ahead with its trip to Tehran despite the brewing troubles with Iran; the most critical calling the PJD disloyal. The PJD had already irritated the GOM in January when it tried to gain political benefit by its public support for Gaza, including by sending a Ramid-led delegation of parliamentarians to Gaza. The GOM publicly admonished the PJD, which backtracked.

17. (C) In January 2009, Egyptian Embassy First Secretary Tarek Darough told PolOffs that Tehran was expanding its activities in Morocco. Darough said the Iranian Embassy, in part through a cultural center in Rabat, had sent some 300 Moroccan students, some as young as 11, to Iran every year for religious and secular training. He also said a group of approximately 25 Iranian students were studying law and other subjects at Morocco's Mohammed V University in Rabat, but stood out because they already had PhD and Master's degrees *- raising suspicions they had come for proselytizing or other purposes. Darough added that Iran was attempting to buy a refinery in Mohammedia, currently owned by a joint Saudi-Turkish company that receives almost all of its crude oil from Iran. On March 9, French PolCouns Frederic Clavier told D/PolCouns that his government was also worried about Iranian activities here. Azeroual had told him that day Iran was picking on Morocco, which it could paint as a "stooge" of United States and France.

Political and Economic Background

18. (C) Since the Iranian revolution, the GOM has viewed Iran as a potential source of inspiration, if not material support, for radical Islamic elements in Morocco. Bilateral relations had been improving in recent years, with growing numbers of Iranian ministerial-level visits. In return, Iran had invited King Mohamed VI for an official visit that was to have taken place this year, an offer never extended to the King's late father. In an effort to mend fences with Morocco, Iran derecognized the Polisario-led Sahara Arab

Democratic Republic (SADR) in 2000. Only last month (February 16), the Iranian Ambassador to Morocco had publicly reiterated Tehran's non-recognition of the SADR and its support for the GOM's initiative to resolve the Western Sahara issue.

¶9. (C) Iran is Morocco's principal source of oil. In the last two years, Moroccan imports of all products from Iran increased from USD 585.8 million to 796.3 million. Exports to Iran, mostly phosphates, on the other hand, saw a drop from USD 18.3 million in 2007 to 12.3 million in 2008. Iranian investment in Morocco is negligible. By contrast, Bahraini FDI in Morocco saw a massive increase from 2007 to 2008, shooting from USD 3.2 million USD from January to September of 2007 to USD 53 million during the same time period in 2008. These figures do not include two USD 1.4 billion mega tourism projects announced by Bahraini bank Gulf Finance House in 2008. (Note: This a figure is likely exaggerated. End note.) Trade is limited.

Taking it Personally

¶10. (C) Comment: Moroccan policy decisions on this have almost surely come personally from King Mohammed VI, who had injected himself early into the row with Iran with a high profile letter of support for his fellow Arab royals in Bahrain. He may have originally been motivated by his growing ire at Iranian behavior in Morocco. At any rate, the escalating reactions appear now to have gone well beyond the Bahrain question. Iran's activity inside Morocco had been a long-time irritant to the GOM and that the crisis provided an opportunity for Morocco to check it. As Commander of the Faithful, the King could not look kindly at Iranian efforts to foster Shi,sm in Morocco. The attendance and public profile in Tehran of the PJD and a member of the not-quite-legal Adl Wa Ihsane (Justice and Good Works or JCO) movement may have been the final straw for Morocco. We likely have not yet heard the last word. Press today reported that Hezbollah released in Lebanon an expose of Moroccan-Israeli political and economic links, that it appears could only have come from Iranian intelligence. End comment.

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